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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
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Summary record of the 1233rd meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 11 July 2014, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Patten (Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of the Chairperson, Ms. Patten (Vice-Chairperson) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined initial and second to fifth periodic reports of the Central African Republic (CEDAW/C/CAF/1-5; CEDAW/C/CAF/Q/1-5 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of the Central African Republic took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Samba Maliavo** (Central African Republic), introducing the initial and second to fifth periodic reports of the Central African Republic (CEDAW/C/CAF/1-5), said that his country faced an extreme crisis, with over half of the population requiring humanitarian assistance. To address discrimination and gender inequality, it had ratified a number of international human rights instruments; drawn up a national policy for promoting equality and related action plan; established a sectoral committee to mainstream gender in sectoral and development policies; submitted for approval a bill on gender equality; was reviewing the Family Code to remove discriminatory provisions; and had amended the Criminal Code to protect women against all forms of violence. The accession of a female Head of State was a milestone in the fight for equality; 35 per cent of those in the transitional Government were women, and the National Transitional Council had 10 per cent more women than in the previous parliamentary term.

3. Nevertheless, certain inequalities persisted: women had restricted educational opportunities and thus limited capacity to take decisions and participate in community life; the gender dimension was not sufficiently reflected in development efforts; low proportion of the budget was allocated to gender issues; women were underrepresented at all levels of decision-making bodies; the absence of judicial authorities in certain areas meant that offenders could commit crimes with impunity; and many girls and women did not have adequate recourse to justice in cases of sexual violence. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs claimed that there had been over 2,000 victims of rape and sexual violence between December 2013 and June 2014. Although the transitional Government had integrated gender issues into its road map for the transitional period, its goals could only be achieved with considerable assistance from the international community and in conditions of security and peace.

Articles 1 and 2

4. **Ms. Schulz** said that the delegation's presence was a sign of its willingness to take action in favour of women's right at a critical moment. However, she expressed concern that: the information in the periodic report dated back to 2010; according to an independent expert's report, efforts towards reconstruction had been slow and the country had shown a lack of commitment towards women's rights; and trade in arms and acts of violence against the population, particularly women and children, were apparently rife. She wished to know how the gender dimension was taken into account in measures to rebuild the State institutions in the judicial, health and education sectors, and whether there was a time frame for it; whether the transitional Government accorded priority to the payment of salaries in key areas for women such as security, health and education; what progress had been made towards demobilization, the reintegration of women soldiers and the reform of security forces; and whether the country applied the Committee's general recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations.

5. While the measures adopted to involve women in the peace process, such as the national action plan to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), seemed serious,

they were limited. She asked whether women from all communities were involved in local dialogue; how the Government involved Muslim women who had fled en masse; whether there were quotas for women's participation; what efforts were made to prevent incitement of racial and religious hatred between communities; whether the Reconciliation Commission and Permanent Commission on Dialogue were operational; what importance the two commissions accorded to gender; and whether there were other bodies associated with reconciliation efforts, and, if so whether they mainstreamed the gender dimension.

6. She asked why, despite having a monist legal system and a provision recognizing the superiority of international treaties over national law, the State party did not accord the Convention priority nor apply its definition of discrimination in national law; whether there was a scheduled programme for removing discriminatory laws; whether the State party was working with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) on that process; and what progress had been made towards ratifying the Optional Protocol and the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1.

7. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said that the figures for cases of sexual violence were reportedly far higher than the figure of 2,000 mentioned in the opening statement. According to an independent expert's report there was insufficient official information on the extent of sexual violence, with estimates arguably low because many displaced persons were unable to access medical services and feared reprisals. She asked what efforts had been made to uncover the real extent of sexual violence, provide victims with assistance and bring those responsible to justice; whether the survey mentioned in question 5 of the list of issues (CEDAW/C/CAF/Q/1-5/Add.1) had been completed and had yielded results; whether the international community had been called upon to provide comprehensive medical treatment to victims of sexual violence; whether the 20 per cent of health-care facilities not destroyed during the conflicts were able to meet the demands of victims of sexual violence; and whether emergency contraception was available to the large number of women and girls living with HIV/AIDS.

8. Referring to a recent United Nations Security Council statement which underscored that transitional authorities had the primary responsibility to protect civilians, she asked whether the transitional Government had imposed a zero-tolerance policy against anti-Balaka and Seleka offenders and how it sought to bring them to justice. If the Central African Republic was to recover from the killing spree, those who masterminded, committed or participated in war crimes must be brought to account. Lastly, what attention had the transitional Government paid to an Amnesty International report documenting and naming chief offenders?

9. **Ms. Haidar** expressed concern at figures indicating that over 900,000 people — one fifth of the population — had been displaced internally or across the country's borders and at allegations that the displacement was connected with ethnic cleansing. She wished to know how the State party understood its role of protecting displaced persons and how it kept towns secure enough to allow internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return home.

10. She also asked what had been done to limit the proliferation of arms; how the country worked with humanitarian actors to evaluate needs of IDPs in specific sectors, and the accuracy of NGO reports that a large number of Muslims had been confined in rooms in Bangui. While the transitional Government's efforts to promote national reconciliation were laudable, if no steps were taken to prevent further displacement, the country could get trapped in a vicious cycle of action and reaction. What steps did the State party plan to take?

11. **Mr. Bangayassi** (Central African Republic) emphasized that his country needed effectively to be rebuilt owing to the unprecedented and extensive devastation, adding that all the data collected before the crisis would need to be updated. A national policy on

gender equality and equity had been drafted encompassing all developmental sectors and two government departments dealing with gender issues had been established. In addition, a sectoral committee had been established, comprising a focal point from each ministry and development partners.

12. There were limited national security forces available and the transitional Government took advantage of humanitarian visits to assess the situation on the ground; yet to fully understand the impact on the population, security would need to be restored in more areas. Although disarmament, demobilization and the reintegration of women and child soldiers were priorities, the Government was still only in an exploratory phase. At the end of 2013, with the support of MINUSCA, the Government had adopted an action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which emphasized the role of women in conflict resolution and peace efforts.

13. **Mr. Djada** (Central African Republic) said that three transit centres had been opened for women and girl soldiers. Muslims were confined in Kilometre 5, Bangui, because they were killing any non-Muslims who tried to return. Muslims had also been confined in the area of Bouda, but the Government had dispatched a five-person team to negotiate for them to be sent to Chad. Since the transitional Government had been in power, the Ministry of Health had set up a coordination committee to meet humanitarian actors regularly in order to make all parties aware of the situation on the ground.

14. It was difficult to talk about security measures in towns and villages because the Central African Republic was so vast. Southern stretches of the country were relatively secure, administrative authorities were present and Muslims and non-Muslims coexisted in harmony, while in the entire east of the country, anti-Balaka and Séléka forces were still present. The violence was not the result of ethnic cleansing, but did indeed involve a conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims. Current assessments of the situation were hasty and did not provide a complete picture; accurate and in-depth studies were required to ascertain the fundamental causes of the problem and allow a peaceful solution to be found. The transitional Government had closed some areas and requested assistance from development partners to ensure that the entire population could return home.

15. **Mr. Mamadou** (Central African Republic) said that the transitional Government had organized IDPs into various camps. In Bangui, IDPs had spontaneously set up camps around the airport where the French army was stationed. Free medical services had been provided throughout the capital by NGOs, and there was a hotline for rape victims. In May 2014, the Government had signed an agreement under the auspices of an international organization to provide free health care for the entire population. Although humanitarian assistance and health care were in general available in Bangui, in most of the country, health care for the most vulnerable was restricted to humanitarian corridors.

16. Cooperation with humanitarian organizations was conducted on two levels: the strategic level was handled by the coordination committee, while on the operational level, 12 clusters had been established to provide a range of humanitarian assistance for people in distress. Government leadership in coordinating interventions needed to be non-negotiable, although some NGOs were failing to meet their obligations to report to the Government.

17. Re-establishing State institutions in the provinces would be a complicated task because outside Bangui, security forces were scarce and many judicial buildings and records had been destroyed. Even if staff was assigned to the provinces, there was no guarantee for their security. The Central African Republic had appealed to the International Court of Justice to bring to justice those responsible for the tragic events in the country since 2012. Round-table discussions had also been held in Equatorial Guinea, bringing together government, anti-Balaka and Séléka elements to discuss the country's future and

pave the way for national reconciliation. While calls had been made for an amnesty law to be introduced, in his view, those responsible for the recent crimes should be punished.

18. **Ms. Ramadan** (Central African Republic), acknowledging that much of the information contained in the report had undoubtedly become outdated since its submission, said that, during that four-year period, resources of necessity had been channelled into emergency humanitarian aid, leaving little for the implementation of equality policies and related action plans. Following the country's invasion by Séléka, revenues generated by the country's natural resources, where still extant, had been appropriated by the rebels, with serious implications for State income. The transitional Government had had to take on loans from the Republic of the Congo and the International Monetary Fund simply to meet its wage commitments, yet State salaries remained in arrears and State revenues continued to fall.

19. The disarmament plan central to the road map for the future incorporated a gender perspective to provide for the many women and children who had been forced to take up arms. A national action plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) had also been approved, but lack of resources was preventing progress on the ground. Humanitarian dialogue to discuss amnesty and establish the bases for reconciliation had commenced, although the President had made it clear that impunity would not be tolerated. Reconstruction was essential to the reconciliation process as prisons, courts and many other key infrastructures had been annihilated in the conflict.

20. The war had not been a religious one, but one in which religion had been used for political ends. The truth was that many young people had joined the conflict not out of conviction or deep-rooted affiliation but as a means to escape poverty and unemployment. Violence attributed to young Muslims might better be described as violence perpetrated by young persons rebelling against their economic and social situation. Religious leaders and organizations were, on the other hand, making significant contributions to the peace and reconciliation process. The presence of Muslim women on the recently established coalition of women for peace and reconciliation had enabled the new platform to access Muslim areas and talk with the communities directly.

21. Insufficient resources had prevented the establishment of integrated care programmes for women that encompassed health, education and legal assistance. The transitional Government continued to petition its international partners for the comprehensive support that many neighbouring countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, had received in post-conflict situations, emphasizing that the Central African Republic was the only country of the Great Lakes Region not enjoying the benefits of such programmes. Illustrative of that situation was the fact that, while the acts of murder and rape committed in 2003 had been duly investigated and tried before the International Criminal Court, the associated victim support programme had been suspended in 2013 due to lack of funds and the unstable security situation. Without assistance from development partners and humanitarian organizations, the State party was unable either to duly investigate allegations of sexual violence or provide women with the services needed to help them recover from the trauma. Emergency contraception, HIV/AIDS prevention services and perinatal care would also remain lacking.

22. **Ms. Šimonović** asked the State party to explain the reasons for its extremely long delay in submitting the report. She wished to know whether the Convention was recognized as a legally binding instrument for the protection of rights and whether its provisions were applied in legal proceedings. She would also like to know more about the national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), including whether it contained links and references to the Convention and the national action plan for its implementation.

23. **Ms. Haidar**, recalling the concerns raised about possible ethnic cleansing, asked what proportion of the Muslim population had been displaced and what provisions had been made for them. Clarification regarding the circumstances that had forced so many to flee to Chad would be appreciated.

24. **Ms. Schulz** asked how the Government determined its priorities and whether the needs of women took precedence. She would like to know whether the reconciliation commission and the permanent commission on dialogue were fully operational and what resources they had been allocated; what measures had been adopted to prevent incitement to hatred and hate speech; what time frame was envisaged for the elimination of discriminatory legislative provisions; and whether the Government was cooperating with MINUSCA in that area.

25. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked what the State party was doing to restore its prisons, address the security challenges within the judicial system and prevent impunity; whether it concurred with those who ascribed the crisis to a failure of successive governments to impose the rule of law and prevent the marginalization of certain regions and minorities and viewed the conflict as political rather than religious; and what support it was seeking from the international community to help to rebuild the social fabric.

26. **Mr. Samba** (Central African Republic) said that the poor governance of previous regimes was undoubtedly at the root of the crisis. The minority Muslim population had felt marginalized and had eventually reacted. What was important at that point was to identify not causes but solutions; in order to achieve that goal, greater calm, compassion and brotherhood was needed on all sides. Security issues underpinned all the Committee's questions; once security was restored, the violence against women would cease and their rights could be upheld.

27. There had been no ethnic cleansing. The transitional Government had been powerless to stop the exodus of Muslims to Chad, which had been driven by security fears, but it would be looking for ways to encourage their return.

28. **Ms. Ramadan** (Central African Republic) assured the Committee that the late submission of the report was not indicative of a lack of concern for gender issues. Women's advancement had been a central pillar of government strategy since independence and the Directorate-General for the Promotion of Women had existed since the 1990s. However, the State party was dependent on the support of the international community for most of its actions and its earlier attempts to submit reports, in 2002 and 2006, had been frustrated by insufficient funding, expertise and data, and a lack of consensus among its supporting partners.

29. The action plan to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) covered disarmament and gender issues. Women had been involved in the conflict as combatants and as sex slaves and that problem had not yet been eradicated, again due to lack of funding. A programme had been initiated but, as so frequently occurred, funds had had to be diverted to emergency interventions. She asked the delegation to clarify their questions regarding prioritization.

30. **Ms. Schulz**, noting that certain services, such as health services, were beneficial to all population segments but particularly important for women, explained that she wished to know whether, in determining the allocation of its scant resources, the State party prioritized programmes that were of particular benefit to women and girls.

31. **Ms. Ramadan** (Central African Republic) said that in the 50 or so camps established since the start of the crisis, the transitional Government had been working with the World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund to identify women's sexual and reproductive health needs and gather information about gender-based

violence during the conflict. Additional, targeted services were being introduced in response to the findings. The distribution of basic hygiene kits, known as dignity kits, was one such measure. At the nationwide level, the Government endeavoured to ensure that gender was taken into account in all policy areas.

32. **Mr. Mamadou** (Central African Republic), highlighting the mix of faiths represented on the delegation and the fact that, although Catholic churches had been targeted by Séléka, they had also provided refuge for Muslims, said that it was important to avoid easy analyses. He conceded, however, that the marginalization of Muslim areas close to the border with Chad and South Sudan had contributed to the crisis. The solution lay in education, and responsibility for ensuring that children received education lay with parents. Unfortunately, some parents chose to send their children to madrasas where they did not receive the essential instruction in French, English, mathematics and computing that would enable them to compete on equal terms upon reaching adulthood.

33. Cooperation with MINUSCA was ongoing. Many pieces of legislation, including the Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Family Code, had already been substantively revised to eliminate provisions that ran counter to the interests of certain social groups. For example, provisions that compromised women's right to landownership had been removed from the Family Code and the Electoral Code was being reworked to facilitate women's access to public office.

34. **Ms. Haidar** said that the State could not absolve itself of responsibility for ensuring that all children of both sexes completed the basic compulsory education curriculum.

35. **The Chairperson**, noting that the non-Muslim population had also on occasions been marginalized, said that inequality, as the main cause of the conflict, was the key issue to be addressed.

36. **Mr. Samba** (Central African Republic) agreed that responsibility for the marginalization and subsequent conflict lay with the State, recalling that some 20 years previously, at a national conference at which all parts of the country had been represented, the Muslim community had alerted the Government to the sense of abandonment felt by many living in the north and had warned of the possibility of armed uprising. Looking to the future, in order to resolve the security situation the Central African Republic needed not only prisons but an entire functioning judicial system, including police officers, courts and judges. Holistic guidance, support and assistance from the international community was required to emerge from the disastrous situation.

37. **Mr. Djada** (Central African Republic) highlighted the need for caution when speaking of marginalization. Muslims were the main economic actors in the country and although the north had indeed been marginalized it was a Christian as well as a Muslim region. The media had aggravated the crisis through references to honour killings and revenge attacks. Sanitation and health systems as well as a functioning judicial system were essential to the restoration of safety and security. Many displaced women were giving birth in the scrubland and many died for want of medical assistance. Since ratifying the Convention, the Central African Republic had taken account of its provisions in law, policies and programmes and had established a framework for its implementation, including a draft law on gender parity. However, resources were urgently required to build on that framework.

Article 3

38. **Ms. Zou** Xiaoqiao, noting that the information provided about the national machinery for the advancement of women was limited, asked the delegation to clarify whether the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and Social Work referred to in paragraph 463 had subsequently become the Ministry of Social Affairs, National Solidarity

and the Family referred to in paragraph 169, and which agency was currently responsible for overseeing and coordinating women's policies. She would like to know more about that agency's mandate, its human and financial resources, its visibility and authority and the mechanisms it used to monitor the situation of women. Recalling that there were also departments for the advancement of women in each of the country's seven regions, she asked what guidance the central agency gave to those local departments and what resources were allocated to them.

39. An update on progress towards the adoption of the bill to establish a national human rights commission would be appreciated. She would particularly like to know whether the bill had been aligned with the Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (Paris Principles), whether the commission's competencies included gender equality issues, and when it would be formally established and operational.

40. The delegation was also invited to provide more information about the objectives, strategies and results of the National Policy for the Promotion of Equality and Equity, adopted in 2007, to clarify whether the National Policy for the Advancement of Women, adopted in 2002, was still operational, and to detail the impediments to the effective implementation of both policies. Had any evaluation of their efficacy been conducted and would their content be revised to reflect the current situation of women in the Central African Republic?

41. **Ms. Ramadan** (Central African Republic) said that the Directorate-General for the Advancement of Women, which reported to the Ministry of Social Affairs, National Solidarity and the Family, was the institution responsible for coordinating all activities intended to promote gender equality. The Directorate-General comprised the Directorate for Women's Programmes and Projects and the Directorate for Women's Information and Education. There were also regional directorates that dealt with gender issues. The Directorate-General received support from the United Nations Population Fund and other partners.

42. **Mr. Djada** (Central African Republic) said that women actively participated in the activities of communal councils. The Government planned to set up women's organizations that could contribute to development objectives at both the communal and village levels. Those organizations would also work with national women's institutions. Each ministry had its own women's organization. Representatives of those organizations met with the heads of the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs, National Solidarity and the Family to discuss recent developments concerning gender.

43. **Mr. Bangayassi** (Central African Republic) said that the Government had originally planned to create a separate ministry for gender issues but that the situation in the country and the financial crisis had prevented it from doing so. The Government had created the Sectoral Committee on Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction to support the work of the Directorate-General for the Advancement of Women. The Sectoral Committee was composed of senior officials from the different government ministries and representatives from other institutions. An expert in population and development issues had trained all the senior ministerial officials serving on the Sectoral Committee; focal points for gender had also been appointed. The Government's policy on gender equality aimed to: ensure that men and women could participate in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the country on equal terms; encourage women to participate in decision-making processes; reduce inequality in access to resources; ensure that the needs of both men and women were reflected in national policies; eliminate intolerance and violence; and to ensure that women and girls could exercise their fundamental rights.

44. **Mr. Samba Maliavo** (Central African Republic) said that the Government had undertaken to establish a national human rights institution, but that the current situation in the country had prevented it from doing so. However, various bodies already performed the functions of a national human rights institution. The absence of a national human rights institution did not impede the promotion of gender equality in the Central African Republic.

Article 4

45. **Ms. Schulz** said that the State party's national legislation still contained a large number of discriminatory provisions. Experiences in other conflict-torn countries had shown that the more women there were in parliament, the more parliament prioritized the realization of women's rights and providing essential services to the population. Noting that elections for a new parliament to replace the current national transition council were scheduled to take place at the beginning of 2015, she asked whether the Government planned to introduce a quota to guarantee the effective participation of women in those elections and in elections to other State institutions. There should be a quota for female candidates on election lists and for women in parliament. The Committee would also like to receive additional information on the bill concerning gender parity.

46. **Ms. Ramadan** (Central African Republic) said that the bill concerning gender parity had not yet been adopted. The bill established a quota for women in positions of responsibility and in decision-making bodies but not for women in parliament.

47. **Mr. Bangayassi** (Central African Republic) said that the bill on gender parity provided that men and women should enjoy equal access to electoral mandates and elected office. Any form of gender-based discrimination within State or non-State institutions ran counter to the Constitution. Political parties and State institutions should put forward an equal number of male and female candidates for electoral mandates and for elected office.

48. **Mr. Mamadou** (Central African Republic) said that the people of the Central African Republic were accustomed to being governed by men and for that reason they were often reluctant to support female electoral candidates. There was a need to raise public awareness of the importance of women's participation in decision-making bodies.

Article 5

49. **Ms. Hayashi** said that women and girls were frequently the victims of acts of sexual and gender-based violence committed by male family members and the wider community. Despite there being no law that gave a husband the right to inflict punishment on his wife, husbands who believed their wives to have behaved in a way that had injured their pride often subjected them to physical assault. She asked whether the 2006 Act for the protection of women against violence and the amended Criminal Code defined and criminalized sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence and rape; and whether victims of such violence had access to health-care and social services, and to redress. She also wished to know whether the State party intended to amend article 46 of the Criminal Code, which provided that the murder of a spouse in the case of adultery was pardonable. Lastly, she asked what measures the State party had taken to give effect to the recommendation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that it should adopt legal reforms to combat sexual and gender-based violence by introducing new criminal offences and increased penalties, and expand the scope of protection of and support for victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

50. **Ms. Leinarte** said that, although the Criminal Code prohibited the abuse of widows, in practice, they were often subjected to violence and had their property confiscated. The provisions of the Family Code establishing the husband as the sole head of the family and precluding widows from inheriting property and other assets after their husband's death

were clearly discriminatory. She asked whether the Government had considered amending those provisions. Polygamy should also be classed as a harmful customary practice and should be outlawed. The dowry system could also prove detrimental to women, as a husband who had paid a large dowry often thought of his wife as his property. Noting that the Family Code established the payment of a dowry as a formal condition of marriage, she asked whether the State party intended to amend the provision in question.

51. **Mr. Samba Maliavo** (Central African Republic) said that the Family Code recognized polygamy as an option and that the dowry system was an established custom in the Central African Republic. Following established customs did not in itself constitute a human rights violation.

52. **Ms. Ramadan** (Central African Republic) said that article 46 of the Criminal Code had been amended so that the murder of a spouse in the case of adultery was no longer pardonable. The amended Criminal Code and the 2006 Act for the protection of women against violence penalized all acts of violence against women. The Government was working with NGOs to raise women's awareness of their rights. Many wives were reluctant to take legal action against their husbands, as their imprisonment would deprive their family members of their means of subsistence.

53. **Mr. Bangayassi** (Central African Republic) said that the Government planned to establish a rapid response unit to tackle the problem of sexual violence against women and children. The unit would be composed of law enforcement officers and health-care workers. Furthermore, the Family Code had been amended to make men and women jointly responsible for managing the household.

54. **Ms. Jahan** said that, while following established customs and traditions did not in itself constitute a human rights violation, certain practices that were harmful to women and that served to perpetuate male dominance over them prevailed in the State party. She enquired as to the progress achieved under the national action plan against violence, particularly regarding female genital mutilation.

55. **Ms. Šimonović** said that the State party should use the Convention as a tool for addressing all forms of gender-based discrimination and for empowering women. She reminded the State party of its obligation to bring all national laws into conformity with the Convention. She asked whether students were taught about the Convention and other international treaties, and whether government officials recognized the Convention as a legally binding instrument and referred to it when performing their duties.

56. **Ms. Schulz** asked whether the provisions of the Criminal Code prohibiting acts of violence against women and girls accused of practising witchcraft were compatible with those criminalizing the practice of witchcraft. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions had indicated that many of the women and girls accused of practising witchcraft belonged to vulnerable or disadvantaged groups and that they were often excluded from society, subjected to violence or killed with impunity. She wished to know whether the State party intended to amend the Criminal Code to decriminalize witchcraft; and what steps the State party had taken to deter acts of violence and discrimination against those women and girls, to alter social perceptions of witchcraft and to prevent mob justice against those women and girls.

57. **Mr. Samba Maliavo** (Central African Republic) said that although the Criminal Code prohibited acts of violence against women and girls accused of practising witchcraft such a prohibition was sometimes difficult to enforce in the more remote areas of country.

58. **Mr. Djada** (Central African Republic) said that the elderly, the ailing and women with deformities were often accused of practising witchcraft. Persons accused of practising

witchcraft were brought before a customary judge, who was more familiar with dealing with such cases.

59. **Mr. Mamadou** (Central African Republic) said that victims of sexual and gender-based violence did indeed have access to health-care and social services. However, there were currently no shelters to accommodate women in difficulty owing to a lack of financial resources. Despite the fact that a law abolishing the practice of excision had been adopted in 1966, the practice persisted in certain regions of the country. In those regions, excision carried great cultural significance and women who did not undergo the procedure, which was considered to be a rite of passage, were targets of mockery. The Government had launched campaigns to raise public awareness about the dangers of excision. The fact that the procedure was not performed in a medical establishment increased the risk of complications.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.